

Diana T. Artemis
3431 Lakeside View Drive
Falls Church, Virginia 22042

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May 18, 1999

Mr. Lyle D. Jaffe
Dockets Management
U.S. Food & Drug Administration/DHHS
12420 Parklawn Dr., Room I-23
Rockville, MD 20857

RE: SUPPORT OF PETITION TO BAN THE FORCED MOLTING OF LAYER HENS
DOCKET 98P-0203/CP

I SUPPORT DOCKET 98P-0203/CP, the petition to ban the forced molting of layer hens. The lives of today's hens are miserable enough to begin with: hens used for their eggs are squeezed with up to five others into an indoor, wire cage with floor space the size of a folded newspaper. Born to flap their wings and walk around, these chickens are barely able to move; most can never even sit comfortably. To stop them from pecking at each other out of desperation, workers slice off the chicks' beaks with a hot blade, often removing part of the birds' tongues and faces as well.

But when egg production drops, at least 75% of the 260 million laying hens in North America endure another hellish torment: producers attempt to force one last laying cycle out of the exhausted, spent hens before sending them to slaughter. Producers do it by cruelly and unnaturally forcing the hens into a "molt". **FORCED MOLTING THROWS HENS' SYSTEMS INTO COLLAPSE, STRESSING AND SHOCKING THEM INTO LOSING THEIR FEATHERS QUICKLY AND FORCING THEIR POOR, WORN-OUT BODIES INTO A NEW LAYING CYCLE.**

To trick the hens into laying more eggs, producers deprive them of food and water for two weeks or more. Hundreds of thousands of hens slowly and painfully starve to death as a result of this trauma. Any birds who survive grow weak, shed all their feathers, and lose up to 35% of their body weight. To shock the birds' systems further, they are kept in total darkness for weeks on end. The scared, confused survivors of this holocaust chamber crowd together amidst rotting corpses and manure-covered feathers. Starving hens peck frantically at their empty feed trays and weary hens are sent to slaughter. Because a lifetime of abuse has left them with injuries like broken bones, oozing abscesses and internal hemorrhaging, they are used in foods that hide the "taste" of their battered and bruised flesh, like chicken soup and companion animal food.

Forced molting is so cruel that, in 1987, it was banned in Great Britain, and most European countries do not allow food deprivation for more than 24 hours. Yet in North America no laws protect these birds and, as you read this, more than 6 million hens are being force-molted.

98P-0203

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RESEARCH SHOWS THAT FORCED MOLTING IS A MAJOR CAUSE OF SALMONELLA POISONING IN EGGS. THE STRESSFUL CONDITIONS WEAKEN THE BIRDS' IMMUNE SYSTEMS SO BADLY THAT THEY BECOME PRONE TO DISEASE, BONE BREAKAGE AND SALMONELLA INFECTIONS. THE RESULT IS SICK BIRDS AND CONTAMINATED EGGS.

If the cruelty to these living creatures alone is not enough to make you impose a ban against forced molting, then please do so for the sake of preventing salmonella poisoning among the U.S. human population.

Sincerely,

Diana Arterio



Diana Artemis
3431 Lakeside View Dr.
Falls Church, VA 22041



Mr. Lyle JAFFE
Dockets Mgmt
U.S. FDA / DHHS
12420 Parklawn Dr, Room 1-Z3
Rockville, MD 20857

